

28 August 2009

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Committee,

I am so ashamed by the pettiness of this debate.

It is astounding that a country which sees itself as free and equal and open can on the one hand decide that marriage is an "institution" and an integral part of society, and on the other hand uphold a law that excludes a group of people from this institution based on sexual orientation.

By disallowing same sex couples to marry, Australia is declaring that marriage is not about love. It is not about family and inclusion and two people deciding to choose each other. To be honest, I've never thought seriously about getting married. However, this debate has made me think about what marriage is, and what it should be. I have come to the conclusion that we have a choice, not just about who is allowed to get married but also about what marriage actually means.

If marriage is just for heterosexual couples, then marriage surely can only be for procreation. What other logical argument can there be for this limitation? The other reason that I have commonly heard in its favour is that 'the history of the institution' must not be tarnished. And, well, the same could be said in favour of slavery.

So, procreation. There are the obvious flaws in this argument, namely adoption, surrogacy and that this opens up avenues for anyone who can't have children to be exempt from marriage (yes, ridiculous but really this whole thing is). If marriage is about more than increasing our population, if it is about family and commitment and community, then it cannot exclude people based on sexual orientation any more than it can based on race or religion.

Firstly, if the ultimate reason for marriage is merely to produce children then marriage becomes a cold, clinical event; an institution engineered for the continuation of the society as a whole and nothing really to do with the feelings of individuals. This approach, which directly or indirectly seems to be the approach of most opponents of this bill, is entirely depressing. Who on earth would want to partake in such a thing? I do not think I am alone in hoping that marriage is actually a lot actually a lot deeper than this.

Secondly, I firmly believe that any objections to this bill are based in fear; fear of difference and change. If this bill is not passed, marriage in Australia becomes more about exclusion than inclusion. Getting married to someone should be an incredibly positive occurrence, and this whole debate tarnishes it with negativity and fear.

I strongly believe that in order for marriage to continue to be a relevant and integral part of our society, it must be open for everyone to partake in it, regardless of their sexual orientation. If marriage continues to be a discriminatory event that ignores the diversity of our existence, it becomes a negative thing that does not reflect the ideals that people hold it up to.

If this bill is not passed, then marriage will ultimately lose any meaning for me, and the vast majority of my generation. Same sex couples are part of Australian society. They are our siblings, our children, our parents, our friends and our colleagues. Denying them the right to marry will not diminish their relationships but instead invalidate the institution of marriage.

I urge the committee to support this bill.

Thank you for your time.

Kind regards,

Alexandra Pagliaro